Douglas W. Bray

SIOP President 1971-1972

Reminiscing in Tempo

(This title and subsequent section headings are the names of Duke Ellington compositions. His music has been a most important part of my life. I founded the Duke Ellington Society of New York in 1959.)

Springfield, Massachusetts was a good place in which to grow up, big enough (150,000) and prosperous enough to support a highly rated school system, an excellent library, and a theater where Broadway bound shows tried out. It was not far from Boston or New York, and their daily newspapers were widely available. Radio broadcasts emanated from both of these cosmopolitan cities.

By the time I hit third grade, my parents had bought a home and were solidly in the middle class. We were noticeably better off than our neighbors. My father was a purchasing agent for the Fisk Rubber Company. My mother had worked in a department store until my arrival.

Neither was highly educated. My father left his one-room school after the fifth grade to the mutual relief of the school and himself. He got his first job soon thereafter and was always deeply involved in work. My mother longed to attend high school but had to drop out after eight grades. Her modest earning power was needed. Her mother, with two daughters, had divorced my grandfather before the turn of the century, quite a bit ahead of her times! My mother never lost her love of learning. She spent hours in the library in the months preceding my birth in the hope that this prenatal environment would somehow help to produce a bright offspring.

I was an only child, which had many advantages. One big disadvantage was forestalled by my parents' support of a friendship which started in kindergarten. When we moved to a different part of town, a couple of years later, Jimmy stayed with us most week-ends for the next six or seven years, several weeks each summer, and lived with us for a while when his mother was ill. We drifted apart later, but more recently found ourselves living within a few miles of each other. He attended my 75th birthday party as he had my 5th.

Wall Street Wail

Springfield had a choice of high schools, and I attended Classical High, the college prep school. This was not because of any strong motivation to attend college, which was rather peculiar since I had always liked school and done well in it. In any case, college seemed out of the question since my family's fortunes had suffered severely during the great depression. We dropped from affluence to almost the poverty level.

By 1936, however, my father had finally gotten a sales job and a used car to get around in. Early that September, he passed American International College (AIC) in Springfield and noticed that the gardener was a man who had worked with him at Fisk before the crash put an end to many managerial careers. My dad stopped to talk and discovered that his friend had two children enrolled in AIC. He said he could afford this because there were scholarships available as well as National Youth Administration part-time jobs.

That was all my father needed to hear. He went in, talked to the president of the college, and not only enrolled me, but picked my major, social work! The college was just initiating this program, and I feel sure the president had sold my father on the choice.

That evening, my father picked me up at the Eastern States Exposition where I'd been lucky to find a week's employment on a hamburger stand. He told me what he'd done. I wasn't all that enthused but talked it over with the hamburger stand manager, my mentor for the previous three days. This gentleman declared that this was a great opportunity, and so I entered AIC two weeks after the start of the semester .

What Am I Here For?

Starting off on a social work major wouldn't seem to destine one to becoming an industrial psychologist, and, in truth, there were many career twists and turns and chance events ahead. For starters, the social work program at AIC never got off the ground and evaporated during my freshman year. That program, however, had required me to take introductory sociology, which I found stimulating. This became my major. The following year found me in two psychology courses, also exciting, and I went on to complement sociology with a psych minor.

I was no expert on academic career matters, but as graduation approached, I realized that I would have to go on to graduate school if I wanted to be a sociologist. Money was a problem since my father was unsympathetic. His scenario had called for a college degree and a prosperous career, not unending education. I applied to several schools, including Harvard, for financial aid, without success. American International College didn't have much clout with famous universities in those days.

Clark University saved the day. They were looking for graduate students in psychology and had assistantships available. I made tracks for Worcester, and was both admitted and promised financial aid. I had no regrets about leaving sociology behind. As I had gotten deeper into psychology, I had begun to feel that sociology was too far removed from individual behavior. Psychology was more satisfying.

Two days after the die was cast, a letter arrived from Harvard. Someone offered a fellowship in sociology had declined, and I was next on the list! AIC's president pleaded with me to reconsider. No AIC graduate had ever been awarded a Harvard fellowship. I refused, but had that letter arrived a few days earlier, life would have been very different.

Industrial psychology was still nowhere in sight. My Masters major at Clark was abnormal psychology. I did my thesis with Saul Rosenzweig with the rather vague goal of eventually becoming a psychotherapist. I didn't continue toward a doctorate at Clark. I thought the World War II draft would find me at any moment. I went to work in a defense plant waiting for that to happen.

Actually, I wasn't drafted until late in the war. By that time the Aviation Psychology Program was fully staffed. Nevertheless, I arrived at the reception center with a letter from Don Marquis, I believe, whom I did not know, saying that I should be considered for the Program. This worked, even though I was told later that they had meant to withdraw reception center requisitions, and I was on board in a week. I started in a Medical and Psychological Examining Unit, moved on to Psychological Research Unit I, and wound up in Psychological Research Project (Radar). This very impressive program with its emphasis on behavioral evaluations and practical applications led me to decide that I would become an applied psychologist.

But what kind of an applied psychologist? I didn't know anything about graduate schools. I knew they differed in quality, but I thought you could major in any branch of psychology at all of them. I wrote for application blanks to Ohio State, Yale, and MIT. Stuart Cook, my commanding officer in the radar project had suggested MIT, where Kurt Lewin had set up shop. I threw the application blank for the only one of these schools that had an industrial psychology program, Ohio State, into the wastebasket. It amounted to an interminable list of nit-picking questions. I figured that wasn't a place I wanted to be.

I visited Yale and MIT while on furlough and was interviewed by Carl Hovland and Kurt Lewin (talk about the big time!). They were both extremely cordial and gave me to understand that I would be accepted were I to apply to their institutions. This I did, asking for financial aid as well. Choosing between Yale and MIT would have been tough, but chance once again intervened and made up my mind for me. MIT postponed the date of fellowship awards until June 1 of 1946 to give more returning veterans a chance. Yale stuck by the traditional date of March 1, admitted me, and threw in a fellowship to boot. I gladly accepted and have always been happy it turned out that way.

Industrial psychology was still some time away. I found most of the other graduate students at Yale busily running white rats or studying clinical. The course in industrial psychology listed in the catalog wasn't given. This was surprising but not catastrophic since I was thinking of opinion polling or consumer research as a possible goal. So I majored in social psych with Leonard Doob, a stimulating advisor. Carl Hovland, who was later to influence my life dramatically, offered to provide a minor in industrial by prescribing an extensive reading list and a minor area exam.

Seven years later, while a Research Associate with the Conservation of Human Resources at Columbia University, Carl invited me to lunch at AT&T where he, unbeknownst to me, was a consultant. The lunch led to a job offer, and what a job! I was to design and conduct an ambitious longitudinal study of the careers of managers, which I titled the Management Progress Study.

So life had taken charge of a planless young man and deposited him in just the right place twenty years out from the hamburger stand. I was an industrial psychologist.

The Biggest and Busiest Intersection

Duke Ellington declared that once he had decided to make music his career, he had no problem taking off in a new direction every time an old avenue was running out. When he left home, there was someone standing on the first comer telling him "Edward, go that way." Then there were many more comers where someone would say, "Edward go that way." There was always someone there at just the right moment. This was Duke's arch way of giving credit to his inspirations and guides. Many have done the same for me. Here are a few of them.

Howard Davis Spoerl

In the 1930s, American International College was a small and decidedly not affluent institution. The psychology faculty consisted of just one person, a new Harvard Ph.D. who arrived on campus the same time I did. He was absolutely unique. He dressed conservatively in a black suit, like an academic of yesteryear. He talked to himself, cursing traffic, pollution, war makers, the government, and sundry others. He was a minister in the Swedenborglan Church and had an imaginary pet horse named Oskar. We might come to class and find that Howard had drawn a picture of Oskar on the blackboard, such as one depicting him eating Adolf Hitler's hair and declaring it to be "Ersatz."

As a sophomore, I had two courses with Howard, social psychology and personality. The text for the personality course was Gordon Allport's Personality, which had just been published. Howard had gotten his degree under Allport and was just completing the translation of Wilhelm Stern's General Psychology. Stem was a personalistic psychologist, and Allport championed ideographic approaches as contrasted to the nomothetic. Spoerl and Allport inclined me strongly toward what Henry Murray called "personology."

I was deeply attached to Howard Spoerl, and noticing that he was one of the few faculty members who didn't have a student assistant, I applied for the job. He agreed, and I spent many hours with him during my junior and senior years. Most of the time I worked in the study of his home cataloging reprints. I had to read them to do this, and I suspect he gave me this chore, in part, to further my education in psychology.

Howard's wife, Dorothy, was about to undertake graduate work in psychology at Clark University. It was she, in fact, who called Clark to my attention when I was having difficulty making graduate school arrangements. So we started there together, commuting a hundred miles a day on two-lane roads, through the winter in a 1931 Chevy.

Stuart W. Cook

My final and most significant assignment during World War II was with Psychological Research Project (Radar). We operated under the general charter of the Aviation Psychology Program which was to develop and validate selection tests for various air crew specialties. The criterion, as it often is, was a formidable problem. Course grades and instructor opinion were unreliable. Pass-fail in training was out. There was practically no "fail" because of the need to rush airborne radar observers into action.

So we developed our own measures, an impressive set of proficiency tests and standardized performance checks for both ground trainer and airborne missions. In order to avoid mixing instruction with proficiency evaluation, we organized a special group of officers assigned as examiners to administer the performance checks. We also found that radar observer training was not being conducted in the same way at different air bases. So we became deeply involved in training and curriculum development.

These were forceful object lessons. Selection, training, and performance are a system, and you can hardly touch one without getting into the others. Furthermore, it is difficult, but not impossible, to standardize procedures at remote locations.

All this was presided over by Captain Stuart W. Cook, an individual far removed from the stereotype of the Army officer. He was soft-spoken, nurturant, and greatly concerned for the feelings and well-being of others. He was also a person of great social conscience. This did not make our assignment a vacation, as Stuart also had high work standards. The hours were long but rewarding.

When the time came to write a book on the history and achievements of the project, Stuart asked me to write the chapters on standardized performance checks and the measurement of performance. This was great preparation for my then unimagined work with assessment centers and the use, in industry, of proficiency measurement as a criterion for aptitude tests.

Carl Iver Hovland

Carl Hovland was chair of the Psychology Department at Yale during my time there, and I owe him very much indeed. He encouraged me in many ways right from our first exploratory interview. I'm sure he had much to do with my Fellowship, and he also provided part-time work during the school year. He recommended me for a summer job in New York for the American Academy of Pediatrics, which involved recruiting and supervising a team of interviewers in a study of medical practice. He introduced me to consultant Douglas Williams, with whom I had my first experience in door-to-door consumer research and community climate interviewing. And he opened the door for me at AT&T.

Kenneth E. Clark has recently revealed the results of a confidential poll of psychologists conducted about the time I was at Yale, a poll to identify the most respected psychologists of the day. Carl Hovland was second on the list. He was a highly productive researcher and engaging teacher. His incisive mind could be threatening to those whose ideas were not well thought out.

I saw Carl often during my first few years at AT&T. He was always enthusiastic and full of good humor in spite of losing his wife far too early in life and then, himself, facing incurable cancer.

Stepping Into Swing Society

Eli GInzberg

By the time I joined Eli Ginzberg at Columbia, five years before AT&T, he had already established a base from which to pursue his many interests in the human resources area. This was the Conservation of Human Resources project in the Graduate School of Business. Eli was a full professor and also a regular consultant to both the Department of Labor and the Department of the Army. Eli skillfully blended these activities in a way in which each enriched the others. At Columbia he assembled a small group of professionals from various disciplines to carry out in-depth investigations and contribute to an impressive series of books. Shortly after I arrived, a high-level group, called the National Manpower Council, was formed to make recommendations on public policy.

Publication was one of Eli's top goals, and he made sure I got into it. My first assignment was to begin a study of the ineffective soldier in World War II, sparked by Dwight Eisenhower, then President of Columbia. The first part of that study led to a book, The Uneducated, and I was delighted when Eli made me the co-author. Later when I had prepared a series of memos on various basic human resources issues, such as the inherited potential in general intelligence and the relationship of motivation to superior performance, he arranged to get them published in a modest volume. I sent a copy of the resulting Issues in the Study of Talent to Carl Hovland, which may have made him think of me in connection with the proposed AT&T research.

Because of The Uneducated and other Ginzbergian activities, I found my name twice on front pages of the New York Times and once on the first page of the book review section. Eli also gave me opportunities to speak at various national conferences and to testify before Congressional committees. All in all, he introduced me to the big time.

Eli had an excellent feeling for emerging issues and wrote The Negro Potential and Womanpower long before these issues became popular. He and I were very compatible; we found that global and pragmatic approaches often went further than more microscopic and academic analyses.

Robert K. Greenleaf

Bob Greenleaf hired me into the Bell System, suggested the research which was to occupy me for more than thirty years, and paved the way for that research. He wasn't a behavioral scientist but behavioral science was one of the many intellectual areas in which he had a lively interest. To my surprise, I found that with Bob as catalyst, AT&T top managers had been attending seminars conducted by Carl Rogers, William and Karl Menninger, and Carl Hovland, to name just a few. Possibly the idea of a longitudinal study had emerged from Bob's interaction with such figures.

Bob had acquired, deservedly, a reputation with senior management for great insight and unquestioned integrity. He had influence far above his organizational level. As my boss, he was enthusiastically encouraging and laissez faire.

As time went on Bob became more and more interested in ethical and, one might almost say, spiritual issues. His writings, such as The Leader as Servant, began to have wide influence in and far beyond the Bell System. In recent years, the Robert Greenleaf Institute has been formed to promulgate his ideas and to facilitate interaction among those who have been inspired by his vision.

I'm Just a Lucky So-and-So

The role of chance in the events which led me to psychology and finally to AT&T was noteworthy, perhaps even awesome, but more good fortune was to come. Three major circumstances combined to support a highly rewarding career and a fulfilled life: AT&T, Bill Byham, and Ann Howard.

Ring dem Bells

The first of these was the vast arena for human resources research and practice afforded by the Bell System. With one million employees, a well developed college graduate recruiting system, and an up-from-within system of filling higher level jobs, there was no shortage of research opportunities or participants. There was also a readiness to support research, nurtured perhaps by the fact that communications technology rested on the research of the Bell Telephone Laboratories.

There was also no lack of opportunity to introduce new personnel practices. There were always several of the operating companies willing to try different approaches. The innovative practices they adopted, if successful, tended to spread to the less experimentally minded companies and often to all of them.

These conditions opened the way for my group to work not only on the longitudinal studies of managers, but to introduce management assessment centers, strengthen selection test validation, and develop behavior modeling supervisory training. Furthermore, the way was open, helped I believe by the EEOC's detailed investigation of all our personnel practices, to publish our findings and present them at professional meetings.

Weely

During the 1960s, we had many visitors at AT&T seeking to learn about management assessment centers. A few of them later started the process in their own organizations. One of these was William C. Byharn of J.C. Penney in New York. I saw Bill from time to time at professional meetings, particularly since we were both active in the New York State Psychological Association. On one of these occasions, Bill surprised me by saying that he was going to form a consulting company and staggered me by inviting me to be his partner. I thought this was out of the question since I had no intention of leaving AT&T, and

I felt sure they wouldn't permit my entering into such an affiliation. Bill pushed me to at least inquire, and, lo and behold, after warning me to scrupulously avoid conflict of interest, they allowed me to do it.

Our first challenge was to come up with a name for the new company. We finally hit upon Development Dimensions, combining the name given to the behavioral characteristics evaluated in assessment centers, dimensions, with development, since Bill was determined that employee development would be a prime goal of our programs. Adding "Incorporated" gave us DDI, which later stood for Development Dimensions International as the business spread worldwide.

DDI's first activity was creating assessment center exercises and assessor training materials. As this work prospered, Bill looked for a second program area and selected behavior modeling supervisory training. This took off and quickly became a much bigger part of the business than assessment centers. Other programs followed during the next 15 years. Bill had built the company into one employing hundreds, with regional and district offices, and doing business in many foreign countries.

Bill Byharn is a unique combination of forward thinker, creative psychologist, indefatigable entrepreneur, and inspirational leader. If this weren't enough, he has the highest work standards and is a truly nice person. It is a privilege to be associated with him and DDI.

Sophisticated Lady

In 1975, there was an opening"for a psychologist in my section at AT&T. A graduate student at the University of Maryland, Ann Howard, had recently attracted attention with the publication of her article, "An Assessment of Assessment Centers." Because of this, she had been invited by the Center for Creative Leadership to a conference which I had helped organize. I learned there that she was about to enter the job market. A few months later she accepted the position at AT&T.

I did considerable thinking prior to her arrival about the several possible areas in which she might work. Thank heaven I decided on the Management Progress Study! Over the twenty years of this longitudinal study, which had included two assessment centers and many interviews of the participants and their bosses, the materials were in disarray. Some were stored at the Fels Research Institute in Ohio. The rest were jammed in assorted file cabinets. Furthermore, due to the press of other business, follow-up interviews were not being completed on time and had even been missed altogether.

Ann took command as associate director of the study, and, after much hard work, the materials were impeccably organized in hundreds of binders and the schedule of data collection adhered to. When the time arrived for the 20-year reassessment of the participants, she administered the activity, including organizing and conducting most of the assessor training.

We could hardly believe our good fortune when it was agreed that we could initiate a parallel longitudinal study, which Ann labeled the Management Continuity Study. She organized this right from the start and, again, administered the assessment centers which kicked off the research.

Superb administration was, of course, the minor part of the story. Ann dug into the data and, starting in 1979, produced with me and solo a series of presentations, monographs, book chapters, and articles which is still continuing. She labored for several years on Managerial Lives in Transition: Advancing Age and Changing Times, the first book combining data from both longitudinal studies. Along the way, she served SIOP in many capacities, including President, and has her own autobiography in this volume.

Ann combines excellent managerial abilities with creative scholarship. Her productivity is great and her standards high. She is a dedicated scientist-professional. Although this is not an autobiography of my personal life, I must boast that she became my wife in 1983.

It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing

Duke Ellington, when asked to explain his success, said it was due to "being at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing before the right people." Three of the terms in this formula have to do with luck, and it's clear I've had much more than my share of that. "Doing the right thing," on the other hand, gives more credit to the person. Duke might better have said "a right thing," since I'm sure he would have agreed that there isn't only one right thing in any field. What have I been doing?

One feature of my work has been a strong emphasis on the observation of actual behavior. In the Air Corps our final training criterion was a five hour aerial mission in which every aspect of the radar operator's performance was observed and recorded by a trained examiner. In my dissertation research the criterion for the attitude scales employed was behavior in a controlled laboratory situation, and, of course, the assessment center, the main tool in my later research, involved three days of behavioral; observations by trained observers. In my Bell System test validation, the criterion was not supervisory ratings but measured performance of criterion tasks. Our behavior modeling supervisory training was validated against behavior in standardized situations.

My efforts have involved ambitious methodology. The Management Progress Study involved three-day assessment centers spread over 20 years, eleven lengthy interviews with each participant, and an equal number with those in the organization who had had a chance to observe his performance. The assessment centers included not only interviews, but objective tests, projective tests, individual simulations, and group exercises.

I have profited from the continuous interplay of research and application. Kurt Lewin once said that there's nothing as practical as a good theory. I'm tempted to say there's nothing as applied as good basic research.

In any case, it's all been a lot of fun. It has been, and is,

Something to Live For